

Grant saves adult school core

By CHANTAL M. LOVELL, Staff Writer

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REDLANDS - Students at the Redlands Adult School are breathing easier after the district announced Tuesday it received a grant that will keep the school's core programs open next year.

Redlands Adult School Principal John Massie said the school has had the grant for a number of years, but was not sure if it would receive it for the upcoming school year.

"The WIA grant, the Workforce Investment Act, funds (the English as a Second Language) and high school diploma (program)," Massie said. "We just renewed it."

The school reapplied for the grant in early March and now knows it will again receive the funding, Massie said.

The board unanimously voted Jan. 12 to eliminate the district's adult education program in response to statewide funding cuts to education. Massie said the state gave the district flexibility to use funding once dedicated to adult education elsewhere in the district, which it chose to do.

"We do not see using state funds for the adult educational program," said district Superintendent Lori Rhodes. "That is the decision we have made. However, if adult education can find grants and federal monies outside of our K-12 program that we can't use, then they should be going ahead and doing that."

Thanks to the grant, Massie said the English as a Second Language and high school diploma programs that were to be cut will now be offered next year. The programs are integral to helping people learn English and

assimilate into and contribute to society, Massie said.

About 50 adult school students attended Tuesday's meeting.

"This school is helping us to become productive citizens who are integrated in this society, able to work, pay taxes and help our children," said student Radostina Rusev, who is learning English at the school. "We don't want to be burden, we want to be working people."

Another student spoke about how the school has helped her overcome some challenges of being a nonnative English speaker.

"Three years ago I came to (the United States)," said student Peifang Jiang. "It has been a difficult time for me because I (couldn't) understand English. So when I went shopping, I

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just open my purse and let cashier take the money because I did not know the difference between the pennies, (dimes), nickels, and the quarter."

Through the adult school, Jiang became fluent enough in English to address the board Tuesday. She continues to take classes to perfect her abilities.

"Now, I'm very happy, I can speak English," Jiang said. "Who changed my life? It's adult school teacher. They taught me how to talk with people. They taught me how to have a better life in the United States. They taught me a lot, a lot."

Massie said the students want to learn and the programs offered by the adult school are integral in making them contributing members of society.

"The dedication and how hard they want to work is just phenomenon so I'm really glad that we're able to continue to provide a program for them," Massie said. "They want their English to improve. We hear that all the time 'why don't they speak English?' Well this is how they learn."

The high school diploma program has already graduated 94 students this school year, Massie said. He expects the school will break its record number of graduates in a single year, which is 121.

The grant will also keep some jeopardized jobs open, Massie said. The adult school budget is still being drafted so the number of saved

positions is unknown.

Massie said there are some classes that may not be offered next year, unless other grants can be obtained.

"The core of our classes are going to continue," Massie said. "If we get new funding, we'll add classes back."

The district will need to find a new location for the adult school currently housed on the Mission school site. This summer, renovations will begin on the Mission campus so it can reopen as an elementary school.

"We can house ESL classes in many different classrooms across the district," Rhodes said. "Just because the school of adult education office or the classroom will not be there on does not mean it will not have a home."

Also at Tuesday's meeting, the board unanimously voted to establish a new position of Principal of Alternative Education and Adult Education. Other positions were eliminated or reduced. Rhodes said the move will save the district money.

"We did have a coordinator of special services that left our district a couple weeks ago," Rhodes said. "That position was at a much higher salary range than the new position that we've approved. We are also eliminating the position as of July 1st of assistant principal alternative education."

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Massie's current position of principal of the adult school will also be eliminated as of June 30.

Rhodes said the district is downgrading the coordinator position and is eliminating the assistant principal and principal positions at the adult school to create the new position.

"We are actually saving money in that," Rhodes said.

The board unanimously appointed Massie to the new position. He will begin working under that title July 1. He will oversee the district's independent study program RISE, a new online program, and the adult school, he said.

"I'm excited because I really think the one size fits all model of education we're using doesn't fit a lot of people," Massie said. "So having more alternatives and having different types of programs can help students who are bright and capable but just don't fit that mold."

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